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the slayer to become a wanderer on the face of the earth and to die in the midst of his wanderings. He becomes one of the *jibiet*, the cursed ones, and what Nuer also call a *guan giakni*, a man possessed by evil. An action by itself may bear evil fruit without anyone saying or doing anything to make it bear. Nuer say that 'it is like a *biit*'. A man who kills another finds all the strength gone out of him. The infringement of a religious interdiction carries its own penalty, for the interdiction is 'like a *biit*'. For example, misfortune will fall, if only in that the cuts of manhood on his brow will not cicatrize, on a lad who during the period of seclusion after initiation has contact with the cattle.

Though the word *biit* may not often be used with the sense of blessing it is sometimes so used, and as the idea of blessing has some importance in Nuer thought a few words may be devoted to it before making some concluding remarks about curses.[1] An older person blesses a younger one by spitting on his head. The spittle (*ruei*) has, as in other parts of Africa, a special virtue and is said to benefit the *yiegh*, the life, of the person who receives it. I was told that this is particularly done by a man's parents when he returns from a long journey, and one man said that it is then done so that the ghosts, who may have forgotten their kinsman, may know him again. A mother also blesses a son about to set out on a long journey by taking his middle finger in her hand, spitting on him, and saying something like 'friend, my son. you will journey on this earth, you will go round [avoid] all thorns [troubles]'. She may also take some soot from the bottom of a pot and mix it with butter and daub this paste on the soles of his feet, under the knees, and on thighs, chest, and head. Spitting figures as a blessing in various other contexts. If a woman does not conceive, her father's kin spit into a gourd and rub her belly with the spittle, asking God that she may conceive. If she does so, the child may be named *Ruei*, Spittle, or *Nyaruei*, Daughter of Spittle. The spittle of a prophet is considered to be especially efficacious in curing barrenness. When a leopard-skin priest arbitrates between two parties and gives a decision in favour of one of them, that man may hand his spear to the priest,

[1] Another word which sometimes has the sense of blessing is *yath*, but, though it sometimes has this sense, it is most commonly used in reference to the making of a gift to in-laws and is then, as in most other contexts, best translated 'to honour'.

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who returns it to him after having first spat on it. When a father has agreed to his son's initiation the boy goes to a member of his father's age-set and this man plucks out a tuft of the boy's hair, spits on it, and brushes it against the boy's face and head. This is the blessing of the father's age-set. A leech massages a sick person with his spittle. Mr. B. A. Lewis records that when the Gaawar tribe chose a certain Bwoogh Kerpel to lead them across the Nile to conquer fresh lands from the Dinka the people lifted him on high so that God might see that he had been chosen, and they gave him a gourdful of milk to drink into which they had all spat.[1] In all these examples—and others could be given—there is the idea of blessing. However, a blessing can be given without spitting. Any person can bless another (pp. 16–17), but the blessings of those whose curses are most effective are also the most effective.

It is important to note that, as with curses, blessings are thought to be effective only because God makes them so. Just as a curse is an imprecatory prayer (for if God is not formally addressed in it it is understood that it is his affair), so a prayer is implied in a blessing. It is a benedictory prayer. Hence (and here again as with curses), a man can be aided merely by a person thinking well of him, bearing him in sweet recollection (*tiim*) without formally blessing him. He blesses him in his heart, and just as God sees a man's just resentment for a wrong and the resentment then has the force of a curse, so he sees the love and the love has then the force of a blessing. So when a Nuer says '*ba ji tiem*', 'I will think of you', he means that he will think fondly of you and so blesses you. A good action in itself may bring fortune to a man. God sees it and it becomes, Nuer say, like a *biit* for good, just as he sees a bad action and it becomes a *biit* for ill.

The religious significance of cursing and blessing lies in a dominant motif of Nuer religion, that of *cuong* in opposition to *duer*, right in opposition to wrong. A person's curse of another is only effective if he is in the right and the other is in the wrong. There must have been damage or negligence, and in Nuer reckoning this implies a social relationship of some kind between the two persons, such as, in fact, is bound to exist between any persons so involved in Nuer society. It is when the obligations of a relationship have not been observed that a curse can act, its effectiveness increasing with the closeness or social significance of the relation-

[1] B. A. Lewis, 'Nuer Spokesmen', *Sudan Notes and Records*, 1931, p. 81.